

Compressor Maintenance AND Air Analysis

by Richard Buttenshaw, Loss Control Representative, ARM-P, CIC, CSP

These days more and more Fire Departments are accessing a valuable resource that gives firefighters the ability to enter hostile environments: an air compressor and self contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). Even the smallest of departments are now sometimes able to purchase this equipment with grant money or donations. Without such breathing equipment firefighters might not be able to render assistance to those trapped inside burning buildings.

The good news is that, thankfully, this equipment is not often needed on a regular basis; however, when it is necessary, it should, of course, function correctly. The first step in ensuring this happens is to make sure that the compressor itself is annually inspected by a certified technician



to determine that it can, indeed, fill those SCBA tanks. However, a second and *equally important* step is to then ensure that the air put into those SCBA tanks is of a **breathable** quality. Not all air is necessarily good, clean, breathable air! Therefore, it is vital that, not only is the compressor serviced to make sure it runs, but that the air it is pumping has been analyzed to make sure it is clean and safe for the firefighters to breathe.

The National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) requires that the air is analyzed by a certified laboratory at least *quarterly* under their “NFPA 1989 Standard on Breathing Air Quality for Fire and Emergency Services Respiratory Protection.” The good news is that an air analysis is fairly easy and inexpensive. The bad news is that, while many Fire Departments are vigilant about conducting the annual service, we are discovering that many are not including the second step of air analysis as often as needed. The danger is that, although the compressor is filling the tanks, it is filling them with unclean air that *may cause serious injury or death* of a firefighter breathing it while fighting a fire. So please check with your Fire Chief and make sure that both the annual service and quarterly air analysis is being done at your Fire Department, and keep your firefighters safe!

